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# THE SOUL OF FRANCE

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VISITS TO INVASED DISTRICTS

BY

MAURICE BARRÈS

*Membre de l'Académie française*



T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.,  
1, ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON.

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## THE SAVAGE ONSLAUGHT OF THE INFERIOR RACE.

FROM Saint-Dié we went on towards Raon-l'Etape, passing through La Voivre. This is one of the villages where the Germans killed the parish priest.

As they were taking him away, an old woman cried out: "Oh God! M. le Curé!" "I am following these gentlemen of my free will," he exclaimed. Perhaps he hoped to propitiate them, or he may have meant that he pardoned them for his death. His crime was that they had just found one of the staff maps in his house. The old woman followed them, and as she kept on lamenting, they seized her. An old man interposed, begging them to release her. Him also they laid hold of, and then marched all three up to a hedge. The priest said: "It is time to tell our beads." He knelt down in the middle with the old people on either side. And the next moment, while they were loading their rifles, he sang the "*Libera nos, Domine*" for the three of them. The Germans shot him and sent back the other two.

That was the old woman's story.

From La Voivre I continued my pilgrimage to Raon-l'Etape. I passed by the Col de la Chipotte. It is a delightful woodland gorge, which claims my admiration every time I cross it and go from Charmes to seat myself at the hospitable table of Charles Sadoul at Raon-l'Etape. Fighting had been going on here for days. The Germans wanted to force a passage

and made a supreme effort to this end. We were content to stand firm. Neither side made much impression at first. It was a knotty situation which was at last unravelled according to our will and for our salvation. But at what a price! Twelve thousand corpses make this valley and its slopes a place of tears for all time. My friend Baldensperger, a Professor of the Sorbonne, a Vosgian who took part in the defence of his birthplace, wrote me a beautiful letter about this Battle of La Chipotte, the absurd name of a now tragic place.

I cannot express my emotion as, chilled by the dreary rain that was falling, I made my way through scenes once so familiar to me, and now no longer recognisable. Their soul is changed. They had been places of peaceful enjoyment to me, evoking images of youth and holiday pleasures. I used to pass through them on my way to visit friends. Now my friends in this region are either fighting or mourning. The plateau Lorrain that I love is for me to-day but a vast expanse of sorrow. We have always striven to ennoble the idea of war, but the Germans have made it foul.

What have they done to poor Raon-l'Etape, the little rose-pink town under the shade of the mountain, near the river? The houses of my friends, Charles Sadoul, editor of *Le Pays Lorrain*, and Louis Madelin, the historian, both with the Army, are happily still intact, but the quarters of the *Hotel-de-Ville* and the *Faubourg de Saint-Dié* were systematically burnt to the ground. Why? Emile Hinzelin suggests it

was because they were the homes of the leading members of societies formed to promote rifle practice and military preparation.

One morning the postman from the Valley of Celles, when he arrived at Raon as usual, about eight o'clock, brought news that the Bavarians had come down the slopes of Le Donon, that they had fired upon his cart, and were following close upon him.

They arrived, preceded by their band, and firing here and there at random. The inhabitants took refuge in their cellars. But these were the very places for which the ruffians made at once. They drank and plundered, killed and burned. The Minister of Justice, who has just visited the district, declared yesterday: "The details of savage cruelty and stupid vandalism are so numerous that it would be impossible to enumerate them—arson, deliberate and senseless, the inhabitants thrown into the flames; a sadic vengeance wreaked upon the innocent, and upon all helpless creatures." Imagine the yells and drunkenness, the scenes of fire and hell, and a pedant of a general walking about the streets and answering the supplications of the women by such phrases as: "What can you expect? This is war!" Meanwhile the thievish wives of the officers were busy packing up everything they could lay hands on and sending it off to a special train which was standing with steam up in the station. The whole wound up with the most ignoble orgy, enlivened by pianola and gramophone.

In every dwelling it left its nauseating dregs. I have already described the *Drunkards in the Charnel-house*, doctors and hospital orderlies forsaking their own wounded in the middle of operations, terror-stricken and helpless among putrefying corpses.

To make my readers realise the tragedy of Raon-l'Etape, I must give a foil to German brutalities and the degradation even of their princes of science. We will turn to a typical case of French nobility and delicacy of feeling in the humblest classes. Let us hear what a young girl, hardly more than a child, was doing and thinking during these shameful weeks in this district. Her letter touched me greatly. Her artless words paint the horrors of war after the manner of Callot. O eternal Lorraine! perpetually trampled by the invader, the fertile soil of virile beauty!

The youthful Hélène Payeur, whose father, a forest-ranger near Raon, was with the colours, was separated from her mother by the fighting, and was left to her own resources for a month during the upheaval. We shall see how this girl of fifteen and a-half protected her sister Rita, aged seven and a-half, and her brother Robert, aged five. Listen to her simple and beautiful story:—

KEEPER'S HOUSE IN THE FOREST OF CENIMONT,  
NEAR SAINTE-BARBE.

MONSIEUR,

I hasten to answer your letter, which I received with much pleasure. I must tell you that we are all at the keeper's house. Mother, from whom we were separated during the battle of August 25th, came back on September 21st. As for me, I went with her as far as Sainte-Barbe,

and stayed there a day and a night, until the German troops arrived. We had brought our best linen and our cow with us. When Sainte-Barbe was set on fire, they burned our cow, and forbade me to save it. I stayed for an hour alone with Rita and Robert, who were crying all the time. We could not hear each other speak for the noise of the guns and the bullets. I ran away across the fields and through the bullets. The Germans scolded me, but they let me pass because of the children.

I got to Baccarat through the woods. But a battle was going on, and my legs trembled under me from terror of the bullets. But I went on in spite of the orders of the Germans. I arrived at La Chapelle when a great battle began above Thinvill, but I passed all the same. I arrived at our house, which had been thoroughly plundered, and I at once began to clean it to make it fit to live in. I had nothing to eat, but the Prussians came to do their cooking at our house, and they gave us food. They killed our other cow. The stench was dreadful, for our cow was in the stable and there was a dead horse in the ditch by the roadside. I had to get them buried, and I complained to the officers. They took all our rye, and they forbade me to bring in our corn, which had not been threshed. Rita and Robert are running about barefoot. They have dug up all our potatoes, and I could say nothing.

I was very anxious, for I had nothing, and I did not know where mother was. It is all very miserable for us just now, for we have to work without earning anything. We have not had a penny for three months. But if I were to tell you all I should never finish.

We have heard from father, and he says he is well, but he does not tell us where he is. Mother saw him at Gir-court, when he was starting for the north.

As to the little hunting-lodge, there is nothing left in it but the stove. The windows are broken and there are many German graves around it. We still have the tablecloth; fortunately we had hidden it in the wood with a down quilt. The keeper's house is burnt, also Miclo's and Marchal's.

Our little dog has disappeared, and we do not know what has become of it.

Charming, placid, courageous little girl! She is worthy of the soldiers who were then covering the passage across the Moselle, and among whom her father was fighting. The blood of Lorraine runs in her veins. What simplicity, what a combination of feeling and logic! What restraint of imagination! How the purity of this young girl, the mother of a family upon the mountain, shines out in contrast to the brutal appetites of the barbarians in their filth at Raon-l'Etape. I do homage to this evident superiority of heart, which, when united to superiority of intelligence, constitutes the genius of the French.

And it is this genius which the Germans wish to crush for several reasons, among others a terrible jealousy.

When we speak of their murders in the district of Raon, when we record that they shot the parish priest of La Voivre, the parish priest of Luvigny, the parish priest and the mayor of Allarmont, and so many others, do you realise that they are inferiors massacring their superiors? A vile race has hurled itself upon beings of a finer mould, and is trying to strike down those who have a moral ascendancy. I see this clearly, and it was this which filled my heart with revolt and sadness during my day at Raon-l'Etape.

I had been told that an abbé of this little town had behaved most admirably, remaining at his post when nearly everyone, including the parish priest and the mayor, had left—quite honourably, in obedience to the orders of the military authorities. I asked to be presented

to him; he was sent for, and two priests arrived. In my embarrassment, I addressed them both :—

“I am glad to be able to pay my respects to you. I hear that you have behaved splendidly.”

“Not I,” said the priest. “It was he,” and he pointed tranquilly to his young confrère.

What fine men! What rocks to build upon! I have always realised and loved the virtues of my compatriots, but the events of these days have awakened and drawn out their latent qualities, a whole reserve of virtues which, under a somewhat cold exterior, constitute the genius of a military but not militarist nation.

The section of humanity the barbarians are torturing and murdering in our open villages, in defiance of international law and without the excuse of strategical necessity, is so wholly estimable! The German nation has remained brutal and barbarous, in spite of all that might have civilised it. It is also evident that their rage at not having entered Paris, their spirit of commercial rivalry, and their jealousy, are playing an active part in the episodes of this war of extermination.

I should like the names of those German generals who sanctioned, or even tolerated, the crimes committed at Raon-l'Etape to be published. These officers are amenable to our tribunals and have incurred the death-penalty. No treaty of peace ought to absolve them, and the honour and interest of civilisation demand that such malefactors should be duly tried and condemned.

*29th October, 1914.*

## THE SOUL OF THE RUINS.

The rain was falling as I reached the ruins of Gerbéviller the Martyr in the evening, to seek out the nuns mentioned by General de Castelnau in his despatches.

“You want to see Sister Julie? You can’t go wrong. It is the only house still standing on your right as you go up.”

The only house! There it was; a house of no particular character, neither the house of a peasant, nor that of a *bourgeois*, but with some traits of each. The dining-room, where I waited a few minutes, was ornamented with a cheap and tawdry hanging lamp. The lack of refinement and distinction attracted me. I was about to see in the commonplace surroundings of a narrow life a soul ennobled by circumstance.

But here comes Madame Julie Rigarel, in religion Sister Julie, whom the General eulogised, whom the *préfet* came to embrace, and on whom the *sous-préfet* temporarily conferred all the rights of the Mayoralty.

“Sister, the President of the League of Patriots salutes you with the greatest respect.”

I explained to the noble woman that I was travelling through Lorraine to enquire into the outrages committed by the Germans, and hear of the virtues of my compatriots.

I could not see her features very distinctly in the dim light shed by the small petroleum lamp overhead. I could only make out that she was



a rather robust and capable-looking woman; she talked quickly, with a pronounced accent, and looked a typical religieuse or bourgeoise of our small provincial towns, but had remained homelier, and her face beamed with kindness.

“But what have I done that people should take so much notice of me? The Sisters of Saint Charles are Nursing Sisters: I could not have done anything else.”

The Sisters of Saint Charles are the Lorraine congregation *par excellence*, an old foundation of our Duchy. Their letters patent of the seventeenth century laid on them the mission of praying for the preservation and prosperity of the House of Lorraine. They have now done good service to the honour of the Lorraine people.

“Very well, Sister, nothing you have *done* was extraordinary for a Sister of St. Charles. But you must have *seen* some extraordinary things.”

“Yes, indeed. The great rifle-fire and the bombardment lasted from nine in the morning till nine at night on August 24th. During the night of the 23rd–24th, they sent us some of the little Alpine Chasseurs to hold the way. About fifty, and they were so young—mere boys. They fought. Bombs and bullets were showered upon us. The Mayor said to them: ‘Boys, you can do nothing, there are too many of them. And you will expose the village to their vengeance.’ They answered gently: ‘The General told us to hold out to the last.’ And they did hold out till the evening, when the

German infantry reached the middle of the town. Then they managed to creep away along the ground and over the walls of the cemetery without being seen by the Germans. The enemy accordingly took their revenge on the civil population. They entered every house, striking the inhabitants and driving them before them. An officer came to my house with his soldiers. He came up to the place where I had my wounded. The poor fellows were trembling. I put myself between them and him and said: 'Don't touch them, they are wounded.' He went to every bed and tore the blankets off to see the dressings. He had a revolver in one hand and a dagger in the other. Sometimes I followed him and sometimes went in front of him. How bold I was! I wonder at myself now. How could I have dared? . . . But then I did not know that they were killing and torturing women and children in the village."

She told me various things about the crimes of violence committed by the Germans, and suddenly, as if terrified by the images she had evoked, she cried:

"Do you think they will come back? Oh! I am so frightened!"

I was deeply touched by this exclamation. It revealed human nature beneath the heroism of the nun.

"They spared you and your nuns, Sister?"

"I nursed their wounded as well as our own. It is my duty as a Sister of Saint Charles. I have a right to prefer ours, but I nursed the others equally. Now, on August 25th, we had

258 wounded Prussians and no one to tend them. 'Where are your doctors?' I asked. 'They have forsaken us.' We dressed their wounds, but we had no expert knowledge. There was one who had two fingers hanging from his hand. I cut them off with my scissors. It was at Roselieures especially that they had been battered by our '75' guns. Some had no calves, some no cheeks, some no ribs."

"Did they complain much?"

"No. They just said: 'How it burns!' They entered Gerbéviller on the evening of August 24th, as I told you. Well, on the 28th, at 5 o'clock, the French returned. You know what a struggle there was, and how it lasted incessantly till September 13th, at 8 o'clock in the evening. The battle was always going on, the artillery duel, and especially the machine-guns, which our people call the 'coffee-mill.'"

The Sister gave me a mass of information, but I preferred to impress on my memory only what would throw light on her own personality. I did not want to hear of the sufferings of Gerbéviller from her: I had seen the ruins; nor did I ask for a description of the battle. That must take its place in the general story of the operations. I had come to see her, to see a person who, all unconsciously, possessed heroic powers, and whose generous soul leapt into life when the hour struck.

"Our priest," she said, "had been carried off by the Germans. The church was on fire. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the ciborium was in danger. I ran and fetched it

from the tabernacle. I brought it here, and, kneeling down, I administered the sacrament to myself."

Here, in this room, under the gilded hanging lamp! This scene explained Sister Julie to me: an excellent nature, divinely moulded. I recognised in her a countrywoman full of loving kindness and practical sense, but deeply imbued with mystical feeling.

While we were talking other Sisters, hospital orderlies, officers, soldiers, maimed men, refugees, among them some children, and a few of the poor inhabitants who had returned to the ruins, entered the room, one after another. They told me that they had now completed the work of burying the dead who had been killed in the battle, and that to-morrow morning an open-air Mass would be said for them, in the midst of the graves. They asked if I would be present and speak. Sister Julie was insistent, but I declined the honour, not, indeed, because I wanted to spare myself a little effort on behalf of fellow-creatures who had given their lives, but because I felt myself unworthy of so great a part, which seemed to me to belong to priests and soldiers—to those who had suffered.

"You would have given pleasure to all of us."

This phrase of Sister Julie's haunts me in the darkness after I have returned to the carriage which takes us once more through the ruins on our way back to Lunéville. I think of the service she has rendered us by manifesting the moral generosity of our nation in the midst of

the German horrors. She makes one understand the cry of the sacred orator : " The hands that are raised to Heaven destroy more battalions than the hands armed with pike and lance." This nun tending the murderers themselves on the scene of their murders, she, the daughter and the sister of their victims, makes a very different impression at Gerbéviller from that made by the *Drunkards in the Charnel-house* at Roan ! Let us hope that this radiant soul of French womanhood may be seen among the ruins of her town by the Americans and other neutrals who hesitate between France and Germany. Why had I opposed my scruples to her expressed desire ? She had arranged a beautiful rite ; she imagined that my titles, such as they are, would add some lustre to it. I cannot but obey her. Back to Gerbéviller ! I go back and say to her :

" Sister, be it as you wish. I am going to sleep at Lunéville, but I will return to-morrow punctually at 9 o'clock, to be present at the Mass on the plateau, between Gerbéviller and Moyen."

4th November, 1914.

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## THE MASS ON THE GRAVES OF VICTORY.

Next morning I returned from Lunéville to Gerbéviller and a little beyond, to Moyon. It had been raining all night, the ground was a quagmire; it was cold, and at intervals the wind brought the dull roar of cannon to our ears. On the undulations of the plateau that we followed above La Mortagne, not a tree was left standing, but trunks, shaved off about a yard above the ground, bore witness to the fury of a battle that had lasted twenty days. The last corpses had been buried, and I was hastening to be present at a Mass over their graves.

Near Moyon I noticed to the right of the road, in the fields, a small crowd, to which silent groups were making their way from every side.

I left the carriage and went towards this assembly on foot. A party of officers came forward to meet me. We shook hands as they introduced themselves. Then we were silent. What was the use of speech? The mounds of earth around us adequately expressed our thoughts.

A peasant approached me, saying : "I am the Mayor of X..... I owned five houses. Not a stone of any one of them has been left standing, and the coat I am wearing was lent me by a friend at Lunéville."

"M. le Maire, it is the duty of France to clothe, shelter and feed you."

He showed me a tragic group of old men, women and children from the ruined villages who had come to join this gathering of soldiers, and pray for their defenders. I repeated these words to them. Then I went and stood in the middle of the officers and doctors, beside Sister Julie, the angel of the ruins, who had put on her spectacles and was bending over her prayer-book.

We were at the principal cemetery of the battlefields of La Mortagne, where a service was about to be held for the dead whose graves lay thick as far as eye could reach, from Saint-Dié to beyond Lunéville.

Imagine the scene : some hundreds of soldiers grouped round a mound thirty yards long, decked with flags, humble wreaths, and piles of arms. At the head of this funeral mound were two groups, one of ruined peasants, the other of officers and nuns surrounding an altar to which a priest ascended. He genuflected, and disclosed a pair of red trousers beneath his vestments.

The soldier-priest ! Amazing figure, which reappears at long intervals in the history of France : the bishop of the *chansons de gestes*, the warrior-monk of the Crusades, the parish priest of 1914, a man who combines two mysteries, and who has a double power to touch our hearts. All heads are uncovered, all faces are tight-set. And, as he begins the office, each listener gives himself up to the musings of his soul. We go back to the great pure and primitive ages of our race. Falsehood

flies, and rites are once more able to uplift the soul to God. The cannon roars in the distance; the mournful bells of our ruined villages toll. And when, at the supreme moment, the soldier-priest lifts the chalice above the battle-field, one seems to hear the beating of hearts deeply stirred.

You were there, you girls of Moyon, the three sisters Hasse, who on September 4th, 1914, wrote from your hearts the following sublime letter to your brother :—

MY DEAR EDOUARD,

We have just heard that Charles and Lucien were killed on August 28th; Eugene is seriously wounded. Louis and Jean are dead too. Rose has disappeared. Mother weeps; she says you are strong, and wants you to go and avenge them. I hope your chiefs will consent. Jean had got the Legion of Honour; you must be his successor.

They have taken our all. Out of eleven who were fighting, eight are dead. My dear brother, do your duty, that is all we ask. God gave you life; He has the right to take it again. Our mother sends you this message.

We send you our dearest love, though we should like very much to see you first. The Prussians are here. Jandon's son is dead. They have stolen everything. I have just come back from Gerbéviller, which is destroyed. The cowards!

Go, my dear brother, offer the sacrifice of your life. We hope to see you again, for a kind of presentiment bids us hope. We send you our fond love. Good-bye, and may we meet again, if it be God's will.

Your sisters:

BERTHE HASSE.

It is for us and for France. Think of your brothers, and of our grandfather in 1870.



You, too, were there, Madame G., peasant-woman of Moncel, who sent these burning words to your husband :—

MY DEAR HENRI,

The Germans have been here harassing us for the last three weeks. I am going to tell you the truth, for I cannot keep it to myself any longer. But you must be brave, as I have been. . . .

You need not worry yourself any more about the family, for you have no one left but me. You know that I have had courage. Courage gives strength; and this is why *you* must have courage, to avenge our two children and our poor family. You must take courage to crush them all and prevent them from coming into our country again, for, if it were allowed, I would myself take a rifle and try to kill one or two of them. You can show this letter to your comrades, so that all French soldiers may try to avenge us. . . . Do not worry about me, for I have no children now. . . . What do I want you to do? Send them plenty of bullets, crush them all, for they are not worthy to see the light.

Women of the invaded districts, such were your admirable and terrible words when the inferior race undertook to break the bones of our race, and beside you, more perfect still, we see Sister Julie and her nuns, your kinswomen, who preserved soldiers for France and aroused the admiration of the whole world. It is the attribute of woman to feel and translate the forces of the blood. It is only when we perceive its deep currents that we appreciate the shadowy origin of the sublime. As I stood on the plateau, throughout this solemn ceremony, in the midst of this motionless assembly, and in its eternal sentiments of love, hatred,

desolation, courage and religion, I seemed to touch the eternal substance, the very soul of the land. . . . The Mass was finished. Now it was my turn to speak. They made me get up on the funeral mound. I was to be their voice, the voice of the ruined villages, of the terrified spaces. But what poet would be worthy to touch the keys of the organ in this open-air cathedral, and to voice the lament of this countryside! I will be content to proclaim the message of victory to the four quarters of the field of battle in the simplest and most rapid words :—

“Our brothers have died, and they lie in these mounds; our houses are shattered and burnt, and our fellow-citizens have been shot or taken away into captivity. But you have not suffered in vain, and your terrible sacrifices have ensured the salvation of France.

“The Battle of Sarrebourg, on August 24th, had been a disaster for us. For four days, the Germans advanced without a check. They thought they would advance in this fashion to Bayon and Charmes, and cross the Moselle. Their pride was their undoing. On the 24th they debouched, with bands playing, at the village of Xermamesnil, five kilometres from here. But they were greeted by a terrible salvo from a French battery emplaced at the abbey farm of Belchamp. This magnificent task was carried out at a noble but decayed spot of old Lorraine, and the ancient glory of Belchamp was revived, while the Germans yelled with pain under the death-dealing shrapnel.

And at the same time, on the same line, they were held up till evening by 51 Alpine Chasseurs, under the command of *adjudant* Chèvre, who was mentioned in despatches. These two bold strokes which arrested the debouchment of two whole army corps for an entire day, enabled our troops to get into position for the attack. This was the reason of the German fury in our villages. If they could have crossed La Mortagne and then forced the Moselle and the Gap of Charmes, Joffre's operations would have been hopelessly compromised, and his armies cut in two. But for twenty-one days the two armies of Castelnau and Dubail held their ground in our hapless, but now glorious villages, and on September 11th the enemy suddenly decamped between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, on learning the results of the Battle of the Marne, which had been made possible only by your sufferings and your tenacity."

Such were the words with which I extolled to my peasant and soldier audience the immediate results of their sacrifices. I might have added more; other fruits will ripen in the centuries to come on the mystic tree of which our dead were the willing roots; but mere words cannot express what still remained to be said. Enough that our souls are ever conscious of the presence in the skies above Xermamesnil and Gerbéviller and in the clouds that hover above the Bois de la Chipotte, of our fallen heroes, who will watch over us in Lorraine.

Indeed the radiance that they have shed has transfigured the people of Lorraine, even in the

midst of the horrors of the war. The horror is still with us, but calm has fallen upon our troubled and distraught spirits. Happy the people amongst whom these dead have chosen to live! Happy the skies which will for ever see their out-spread wings as they watch over and inspire their comrades on earth!

*9th November, 1914.*

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## BURNT VILLAGES.

For the second time during the war I have been visiting the district between Lunéville and Nancy, where the Prussians debouched after the battle of Morhange.

The Forest of Vitrimont, the farms of Léomont, Flainval, Courbessaux, Drouville, are all names connected with my youthful memories that I had ceased to hear mentioned. For the last six months their names have made a chord of anguish reverberate in the hearts of all Frenchmen. How many black-edged letters I have received from all sides asking my help, telling me of a son, a brother, or a husband who had fallen on the field of honour in this district, and asking me to write to the Mayor or the parish priest of these humble villages, now the shrines of the patriot-dead. Among the maps and documents I have brought back from my journey I see on my table lists of names taken down from graves at Courbessaux by MM. Gobert and Alix, by M. Burtin at Gellenoncourt, and by the Abbé Paulin at Haraucourt.

This obituary was not very easy to draw up. From August 22nd until their retreat on September 12th, the Germans fired mercilessly upon anyone who attempted to bury the dead. It had to be done hurriedly at night. Many lay for weeks awaiting burial, and were finally laid in the earth by military fatigue parties, or civilian workmen brought from a distance. No names were placed on their graves. The unhappy inhabitants of the burnt villages must not

be accused of neglecting this work of mercy. Many had left their homes bereft of all they possessed. Those who remained lived under conditions of indescribable hardship, in houses without doors or windows, riddled with holes through which the rain fell as in the street. Billeted troops were huddled with them in these hovels, which at the worst offered more shelter than the trenches. It was very difficult, too, to move from place to place; even in the precincts of the village itself permits were required. Yet, in spite of all these obstacles, the inhabitants wrote names upon many graves, and laid flowers and wreaths of box upon them.

No one, I suppose, has ever passed over this wind-swept plateau without a heartache and a vague sense of calamity. With the mind's eye we see Richelieu's Swedes and the Prussians of Blücher and of 1870 defile, presaging yet more. But now the tragedy of the unchanging rôle of these Eastern Marches throughout the centuries is more sharply defined than ever. We seem able to look straight back to the hordes of Attila, and to the gigantic struggles still attested by the Champ des Payens (Paynim Field), where the remains of the barbarians were buried, and the Champ des Martyrs (Martyrs' Field), the burial-ground of the Roman legions.

From Courbessaux, where the Germans burnt half the houses, we see the redoubts of Le Rembêtant, seven kilometres off as the crow flies, on the other side of the Meurthe, making a long, broad line against the sky, and in the fore-

ground the lofty mass of the Château de Haraucourt.

This stately building is all that remains of the ancient family of Haraucourt, one of the four great knights of Lorraine, who fought for centuries side by side with our dukes. The family has been extinct since 1746; its possessions in forty Lorraine villages are dispersed, but the old castle stood firm upon its venerable foundations. There was no longer any moat, any battlements upon the two great squat towers, any patrician splendour. But it had not fallen into the state of decay that debases so many of our old feudal dwellings, and the Château of the Haraucourts retained a certain dignity in its middle-class avatar. It might have gone on growing old for centuries yet. But it has had a better fate; it has died in battle, like a true Haraucourt.

For three weeks the Germans, who were trying to pierce our lines from Hoeville, Courbessaux, and Serres, bombarded Le Rembêtant incessantly. It replied in a manner truly worthy of its name. French and German projectiles crossed over the head of the ancestral dwelling. And, faithful to its traditions, it harboured the peasants of the whole countryside.

The German aviators may have desecrated the flag of the General's staff, or they may have wished to make the castle and the village untenable. They bombarded it for a week. I went to Haraucourt. I saw the ancient vault which gave an increasingly precarious shelter

to refugees for five days, until at last a shell burst in the air-hole. The huge old beams had caught fire. The two great manor farms adjoining, buildings the like of which we moderns have ceased to raise, the granaries full of corn and hay, the whole village, in short, was ablaze. Over them, the castle and the church towered like two colossal torches. To give me some idea of the fury of the fire and its heat, Abbé Paulin, a patriot deeply attached to the village, his birthplace, said to me : " Our dung-hills burnt for three weeks."

I have dwelt upon the destruction of Haraucourt, because it was a centre of great memories for our little nation, but its history is that of all the villages over-run by the invading battalions of August and September, 1914. It is easy to see why one single sentiment inspires the natives of Lorraine and makes a tie between them; this sentiment is the defence and the love of the army. Nothing is so dear to us as gallant troops and great military leaders. If we want to understand the depths of emotion underlying the cold and reserved aspect of our Lorrains, we should see them confronted with these soldiers of steel and iron, the 20th Army Corps. How those villagers of Le Vermois, each at his door, a friendly smile upon his face, admire the light infantry of Saint Nicolas as they march lightly and rapidly past. It is because the existence of all and sundry is in their hands, and because, when France is not ready to defend herself, this corner of France has to pay the penalty at once for the whole country.



On the evening of this same day I went down to Crevic, the home of my distinguished friend and confrère, General Lyautey.

It might have been supposed that German officers, among whom the *esprit de corps* and class feelings are so strong that they destroy their very soul and take its place, would have made it a point of honour to respect the property of a great French chief. Did they not make a parade of presenting arms to Desaix' monument at Strasburg? I imagined them setting a sentry at the gates of the Château de Crevic, and treating it with the utmost consideration. Well, I had come to see for myself. What silence, what devastation!

I looked up at once under the roof for the General's study, his little book-lined room. There was nothing, neither roof nor books; the whole house had fallen down into the charred ground floor. Through the iron gates, bent and twisted by fire, the old motionless, lifeless house looked like a corpse stranded on the river bank after a storm. Spring has quickened the wide pastures of the park and its luxuriant vegetation, but what an abomination of desolation has fallen upon the pleasant dwelling where, the last time he came to Lorraine, the General graciously and solemnly received the poets and artists of Nancy, the whole brood of Marcel Knecht, and one of his comrades in arms, General Foch, supported him at this ceremony. These two names, Foch and Lyautey, remind us that if part of the material glory of our province has been laid low, its moral glory flourishes more vigorously than ever. The two

Generals (it was in September, 1913) listened with much pleasure to recitations of poetry, and Lyautey showed his guests some precious Lorraine relics.

One of the most precious of these undoubtedly came from the castle of our last sovereign, King Stanislas, at Einville. It consists of four beautiful garden statues. I have just been to look for them behind the house, under a shelter I knew well. Cannonade and fire had spared them. There they stood, safe and sound, on the very spot where the General had shown them to me. How touching they were in their precarious refuge! They were like wounded men pursued by fresh projectiles in hospital.

The gardener came to me in the park, and gave me some details.

The Prussians arrived at Crevic on August 22nd, about 5.30 p.m. There was a section of the 15th Corps there, which they took prisoner. A spy who had been living in a neighbouring farm had decamped two days before. They pursued their main line of march, but afterwards returned. Presently, declaring that a man had fired upon them through the gates of the château, killing one of them, and wounding another, they set to work at once to demolish it. "They asked where Madame Lyautey was," said the gardener. "I am sure they would have killed her; but she had gone away only two days before. They set the place on fire with their inflammable *pastilles*, and in less than no time everything was ablaze. For the first three or four minutes they kept on firing through the shutters."

“Were you able to save anything in the house?”

“Any valuables? After the Prussians had arrived? Not a thing. The General had written in the month of July to say that we were to take precautions. We did not much believe it, we thought it was just his usual way of preparing us for war. But when we knew the Prussians were really coming, we were able to get out some documents which were in the cellar, and the portraits from the large drawing-room. These are in safe keeping at the Museum of Nancy.”

Then, as was natural, the gardener took up the story of his own experiences :

“When they set fire to the house, they took me prisoner. They kept on saying ‘Death! Death!’ and made a pantomime of cutting off my head. My wife was looking at me piteously. They took me before their chief, who spoke French very well. ‘You are the first man I have seen at Crevic,’ he said. ‘Well, how do you like the sample,’ I asked. He could not help laughing. While he was talking to me his men were murdering five peasants with their bayonets, and wounding a woman.”

The gardener finished the story of his adventures, relating how he had taken the men who were to have shot him home with him, to give them a drink. “I said to them: ‘Are you thirsty?’ They did not answer, but they understood all the same. They drank some wine with me, and I said: ‘I won’t go away from my own house any more; they can kill me here if they like.’”

Thus we talked, and I seemed to be listening again to all the stories that were current in the district forty-five years ago. What constancy, what vigorous monotony reign in these hearts and in these regions! More recently, some quarter of a century ago, when I was visiting these villages, which I represented in Parliament, we were wholly occupied with ideas of demanding fortifications for Nancy, severe measures against spies, and strenuous military preparations against Germany. These same subjects are no less vital to-day, and no less interesting to my compatriots. But to these aspirations they have added the very reasonable demand that they should be compensated for the destruction their defenders were powerless to avert.

Night came on slowly. Deep peace brooded over the village. There was no sound but the hum of an aeroplane, patrolling over Nancy. Sometimes the wind brought the solemn tones of cannon beyond the horizon. I was looking at a little kiosk at the end of the park, behind the pond, which the General had once shown me with much satisfaction. It was now the only roof that remained to him in the village of his childhood. But at the close of this day spent among graves and desolation, what I felt was not so much grief, as a burning sympathy with the brave souls of the region, and perfect confidence in the efficacy of their sacrifice. I said to myself: There are ruins of every sort here, except moral ruins.

*18th May, 1915.*

## SPRING AWAKENING AMONG THE RUINS.

I come back to Gerbéviller, which I had seen in such tragic guise a few months ago, immediately after the terrible drama. What a wintry silence reigned then throughout the district, from Lunéville to Baccarat and on the lofty plateau of Moyon, where we held the funeral service for those who had fallen in the battle.

To-day, Nature calmly resumes her intensive creation of flowers, sun, perfume and singing-birds. The inhabitants are returning, eager at all hazards to work their fields, though these are strewn with shells that explode at the touch of the ploughshare. With friendly wiles they enlist the services of the soldiers fresh from the trenches, who are billeted among them for three days. They commandeer the horses of the regiment too. "Poor beasts!" said one tiller of the soil to me, "they are so pleased; they think peace has come back again." And the military authorities, touched by this Lorraine pastoral, agree more or less willingly to stop the firing practice behind the lines.

I look on with amazement at this rural transformation, which extends even up to the blackened stones of Gerbéviller. Last November the martyred town breathed all the horror of a morrow of battle. Her ruins reeked of corpses. She lay prostrate, her features ravaged, her

brow covered with ashes. Now, her pear-trees are spreading their white blossoms against her shattered walls. How did they contrive to escape the fire? And the river runs and sparkles joyously in the sunshine.

Here, near the bridge, a washerwoman, the first living creature we have encountered in this desert of ruins, answers our greeting, stops beating her linen, and begins to tell us of the battle, of the courage of our people, and the crimes of the Germans. She speaks well, and no doubt has a reputation for eloquence, for the village boys make their appearance here and there, and listen, as to the accredited chronicler of the ruins. She saw everything, and she calls upon the houses, the fields, and the woods to confirm her story; then suddenly, as her voice breaks in tears, we slip the offering of our little society into her hand.

Further on, when we stand in the narrow strip of shadow cast by a wall to contemplate the long and silent line of this Lorraine Pompeii, we notice that a newly-arrived caravan of Americans has also halted in front of the poor washerwoman. Seen from a distance, as she kneels there, this peasant might be the model of one of the old *ymagiers*, who carved figures for the *Stabat Mater*. She is talking rapidly, they are shaking their heads compassionately. Now they are consulting together. That's right; their hands go into their pockets. Bravo! my countrywoman!

Who is it she is like? Ah! I know; I have met her again and again in the pages of rustic

novels. It was she—or, at any rate, her brother—who arranged the famous otter-hunt in the first pages of Balzac's *Paysans*; it was she too who pronounced the eulogy on the watering-place in some novel of Maupassant's. But here this humble gleaner among the ruins offers an important lesson to the passer-by. She teaches her hearers of every age that we must either accept martyrdom or make ourselves stronger than the race beyond the Rhine.

But now we hear loud clamours. The boys are crowding round us. How merry they are! I talk to them of the Boches, evoking their contemptuous laughter. The images of the heroic days will be with them for ever. As I follow the road that leads to Sister Julie's house, I listen to their chatter, and rejoice that the events of August and September, 1914, now constitute the very foundations of their being. The fires of their burning houses have become a flame of life to them.

We arrive at the home of the nun who was mentioned in a general's despatches.

"Good-day, Sister."

"Ah! M. Barrès; have you been thinking about our church? Come and let me show it to you. With 5,000 francs we could patch it up till the Government is able to rebuild it. But if nothing is done it will just fall to pieces in the first storm."

She leads me into the lofty ruin, beneath the shell-pierced vault, and there, before the shrine which they systematically riddled with bullets, and the Christ whose feet had been broken off

with rifle-butts, amongst the shattered benches and the splintered glass from the stained glass windows, the noble woman told the tale of her hospital at the request of my friends. I will not repeat episodes now so widely known. I wish you could have heard her making her statement in very precise terms, upright as a soldier of Heaven and of France, without a trace of sentimentality. Her talk was as clear as a law report, instinct with truth and simplicity. Suddenly she paused.

What was the matter? An urchin had approached, and stood with his hands in his pockets listening open-mouthed as he had listened to the washerwoman.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Sister, "what manners, to come and listen without being called! Be off with you!"

I took him by the hand.

"Sister, he is a dear boy who loves to hear how you treated the Boches."

"Yes, a dear boy; and so he must be taught to behave. A French boy must have better manners than the Prussians."

This was unanswerable. Here was a child without a home or daily bread, but thanks to Sister Julie his education would not be neglected. She carries on her civilising mission among the ruins. Ah! Sister, you ask our help to rebuild your church, but all Gerbéviller has become a holy school, and when the vault collapsed the whole town was transformed into an open-air sanctuary.

Nothing could be more beautiful than these



June days, when Nature, stretching her green arms over the ruins, seems to say : " They are mine," and to meet the two arms of the cross raised by women—I mean the lessons of suffering given by these women of Gerbéviller. They cannot go forth trowel in hand to rebuild their town; they must wait for the return of husbands, sons and brothers, but they labour indefatigably, gathering together spiritual materials, the fruitful memories of crimes and noble deeds.

What kind of a new Gerbéviller will rise from the depths of disaster? Life is not extinct in our ruined villages. The fruit has fallen to the ground, but the soul rises again from the earth. The elements which were scattered re-unite, and prepare to blossom more abundantly.

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*16th June, 1915.*

## THE VILLAGE IN THE FOREST.

*(At the Col de la Chipotte.)*

I had paid an unpremeditated visit to Lorraine and had been to my little house on the banks of the Moselle, asking the officers who do me the honour and pleasure of being my guests to give me some luncheon. Although this was only a few days ago, the visit already appears a dream-like memory. It seemed to me indeed a strange and unnatural medley—the rooms, the garden, the flowers, the sunshine, and all those familiar scenes, where now unwonted figures have made their home. Was I a dead man, a ghost, come back to gaze sympathetically at his unknown heirs? The brilliant sunshine of this noontide by the river envelops all the images I carried away with me, like the mists of evening over a meadow.

After leaving my guests, I went for a walk above Rambervillers, in the woods of the Col de la Chipotte, the woods where there was such fierce fighting, where brave men fell by thousands last August and September to prevent the Prussians from crossing the Moselle. It was a magnificent day, and the place wore its usual aspect of solemn austerity. Coming up from the plain this gorge is the first point where we find the pine trees which tell us we are in the Vosges, and where rocks with angular projections pierce the soil here and there. But to-

day I see from afar under the fir trees trenches, shelters, graves and wooden crosses.

There is no one to explain to me the bloody battle of which survivors speak so gravely, and no account of it has been published. The road with its fringe of forest is deserted. Presently we come upon an empty carriage; the horse is tethered in the shade, and further off in the thicket there are kneeling figures, praying. What silence and what solitude! Formerly when I passed through the calm retreats I enjoyed the sense of peace and freedom from care. But now the atmosphere has been poisoned for ever by anguish. We are oppressed by the realisation of our powerlessness to appreciate all the sacrifices that were so freely made for us here, throughout twenty days of furious battle. And I recall a touching letter I had received from Epinal, written evidently by the father of one of the heroes buried beneath these mounds :

Monsieur, we can only congratulate you on the numerous articles you are publishing to propagate your idea of a War Cross. Nevertheless, many fathers think, as I do, of the numbers of soldiers who fell during the month of August, between Le Donon and Rambervillers. What distinctions have been bestowed upon the regiments which were annihilated there, such as the 17th, the 149th and the 152nd, all of which have been reconstituted six times, and also our Chasseur battalions? One of our communes of 2,000 souls has lost twenty killed and ten missing, who are not prisoners. Another, of 7,000 souls, has forty-five dead and twenty missing, who may be accounted dead. All this in three weeks.

Now do you know how many these same communes lost in five months, in the battles of the Marne, the Nord and

others? The first had no losses; the second lost one adjutant. Take the difference in the casualties incurred during three or four weeks at the beginning, that is to say, in Lorraine and the Vosges, and those of five months, and you will see where the real heroes were to be found. Those who fell here after fighting for three weeks at Rambervillers (where they saved us from invasion) and from Thiaville to the Col de le Chipotte, have never even been mentioned by the Press, to say nothing of being mentioned in despatches or recommended for the War Cross. They will be content with a wooden cross upon their graves, to enable their poor families to find their dear dead ones. And you know that there are some 7,000 of them buried between Thiaville and La Chipotte, mostly only a few inches below the surface.

Do you not think that they too deserved mention or a cross? You seem to imitate the heads of industry in our district, who reserve all their favours for newcomers, to the prejudice of their old servants who have worked for the prosperity of their firms ever since they were founded.

These, Monsieur Barrès, are the thoughts of many of our compatriots, unhappy fathers of families, and we hope to see what you have to say to them in one of your early numbers.

Obscure complaint only too well justified, expressed with all the rough vigour of the true Vosgian. Cry of anguish to which there is no reply, haunting me as I pass along the narrow blood-stained valley!

Half-way from Raon-l'Etape, at the point where the new road meets the old one, we turned off to the left into a forest track, muddy, deeply scored, and gloomy. The fir trees, more numerous here, cast sombre shadows. The birds are silent. We pass by trenches, German on our right, French on our left, as is shown by their

opposing slopes, and in some places only a few yards apart.

Nothing could give a more sinister idea of war. In forest fighting, battles soon become hand-to-hand conflicts, either because of the nature of the ground, or the shortness of the horizon. What must those August days and those mosquito-haunted nights following on the terrible heat have been—those nights when the visionary horrors that people forests in the darkness made way for mysterious creeping figures, and the attacks of hell let loose!

Suddenly the forest came to an end, the view expanded; we came out into a cultivated glade, the site of a large village surrounded by fresh meadows and framed in woods. It was Sainte-Barbe. Its blossoming apple trees and its houses dismantled by the war were like a song of spring broken by a song of winter. As we approached, a bare-footed little girl sprang from the road into the fields, crying: "A motor car, a motor car!" What had frightened her so much?

We got out and went on foot to see. Through an open window my eye fell on an altar loaded with flowers and softly gleaming tapers. I went nearer.

"Are you looking at our Mass?" asked an old peasant woman.

We talked together. The church had been wrecked by shells, and a temporary chapel had been arranged in this room. It was a touching sight in the midst of the ruined houses. It may have been the effect of the pleasant evening

hour, or the glimmer of an ancient hope thus movingly expressed, that gave an air of convalescence after catastrophe. The village seemed like a wounded man just able to go out again and still tremulous.

But who is it that is screaming with terror again? It is the same little girl. Our car, which had stopped at the entrance to the village, had come along quietly some hundred yards to overtake us, and the child was running now to the right and now to the left, like a bird fluttering from an outstretched hand.

"What is the matter with your little girl, Madame?"

"She had a bullet in her shoulder when the battle was going on, and now she is afraid of everything."

I talked to the mother and child as I proceeded along the village street, where half the houses were burnt, and half had been shattered by the bombardment. The woman told me that half of the inhabitants had already returned. They help each other, and they live where they can, with those whose houses are still standing.

"I suppose you went away, Madame, while the fighting was going on?"

"I got away to Baccarat with the children, that girl and two others. The whole country was full of Germans. They stopped us and questioned us. A strapping fellow with a red beard made signs to me to come into a field and asked me in very good French: 'What do you think of Jaurés?' I just said: 'Is he one of our ministers? I don't know.' "Don't you

read the papers?' 'No.' 'And why not?' 'I have several children, I have no time.'"

What a hurricane had swept over the land, sending these innocent creatures flying from their humble homes like partridges from their furrows, to run through fields and woods under a hail of shot and shell, sharing the rations now of the French and now of the German soldiers!

"Did no one stay in the village?"

"Oh, yes! a few. There was Sidonie."

"Let us go and see Sidonie."

She was surrounded by friends in a house which had escaped destruction, and told me her story, the audience correcting or confirming her from time to time:—

"The Germans arrived at Sainte-Barbe on August 25th. I was in our kitchen with some refugees. I went up into the attic, and I saw that all the houses were on fire, including the church and the town-hall. I came down again into this kitchen where we are now. The Germans kept coming in every minute. They were talking angrily, and when they saw us all in a circle, they said: 'That's all right.' But in the evening an old man belonging to the village came to me and said: 'Let us be off. They are coming with their revolvers.' So we went and slept in the forest. There were soldiers everywhere. The battle never ceased. We came back at dawn. A tall German walked up to us. I was very angry, because he had befouled my bed; there was manure everywhere, and worse. I said: 'You could have taken what you wanted, but you had no right to make all this filth.'"

“Another German came to us and said: ‘*Mesdames*, this quarter won’t be disturbed.’ There were 80,000 of them, it seems, at Raon, at Baccarat, everywhere. The ground was covered with them. The French were in front of us, the Germans behind; the shells crossed each other in the air. The centre of the battle was here at Sainte-Barbe. First they drank all the wine and then the brandy. They ate the butter with spoons. This went on till September 11th. We had been without anything to eat but potatoes for days. And even these they took from us when we had cooked them. For the last day or two they kept us prisoners. We could not tell why. They said we had destroyed the fountains. We had cattle to attend to; we were always asking to go out. ‘No civilians must be seen in the street,’ they told us, ‘or they will be shot.’ Finally, at 4 o’clock in the morning of September 11th, they went off.

“That evening I said, all of a sudden: ‘Good Heavens, here are our soldiers!’ There were two of them, they were walking along by the houses. I said: ‘How is it that you have not come till now?’ ‘We couldn’t come before, Madame,’ they replied very politely.”

I left these courageous creatures and continued my walk through Sainte-Barbe, which had become too spacious for its little population. All these Lorraine villages, seven months after their disaster, seemed in this first return of spring like wounded men going out for the first time in garments too large for them. Few chimneys are sending out smoke in the midst of



the ruined spaces. At every turn we come upon a series of holes, four houses razed to the ground. It makes one's heart ache, but these ruins are so many wayside shrines for the imagination. The matter-of-fact has been brushed from these realms, where it seemed to hold undisputed sway.

But what is the meaning of this laughter and these groups of young people? Some twenty girls, big and little, are gathered round a window-sill on which lie some dozens of little flags and baskets of periwinkles, which they are dividing between them.

“ Well, *mesdemoiselles*, what are you about? ”

“ We are going to decorate the soldiers' graves.”

Où vont nos amoureuses?

Elles vont aux tombeaux.

So says the popular refrain. How sublime are these children, these periwinkles, this laughter, all this muster of young hope clustering round the dark gates of death!

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27th May, 1915.





